

ADOLESCENT SERVICES

Community Housing Employment Enrichment Resources (CHEER)

42-5

Policy

The Department of Children and Families (DCF) may offer a Community Housing Employment Enrichment Resource (CHEER) that provides financial assistance to youth who were committed uncared for, abused, neglected, or dually committed as of their 18th birthdays and who demonstrate strong motivation and the ability to pursue a post-secondary employment training and career development program.

Funding shall be based on available DCF budget appropriations.

CHEER may include training for non-certified vocational or technical programs, apprenticeship programs or job readiness development. CHEER may also provide job placement assistance.

CHEER shall provide several living options coupled with support services to assist the youth with a gradual move towards successful adult living. Housing options may include, but are not limited to, individual and shared apartments, boarding arrangements and on-site living arrangements offered by an employment program.

While involved in CHEER, a youth shall receive community case management services up to his or her 21st birthday. Case management shall be provided by CHAP private providers that demonstrate competencies in job training, job coaching and job placement.

Eligibility and Program Requirements

CHEER services shall be available on a voluntary basis to youth age 18 or older immediately following high school graduation or completion of a GED, and for a time period not to exceed 18 months. A youth who has not yet reached his or her 21st birthday and has already participated in a post-secondary education or vocational program may be eligible for CHEER.

To be eligible for admission to CHEER, a youth shall:

- be DCF committed abused, neglected, uncared for, or dually committed, at the time of the youth's 18th birthday;
 - have not yet reached his or her 21st birthday;
 - have obtained a high school diploma or Graduate Equivalency Diploma (GED);
 - have exhibited adequate social, behavioral and life skills, as assessed by the Adolescent Specialist and as reflected in the case record;
 - have signed a [DCF-779, "Notice at Age of Majority and Agreement for Service Post Majority \(SPM\),"](#) prior to the youth's 18th birthday indicating his or her desire to continue receiving services;
 - have successfully completed a DCF-approved Life Skills Program;
 - be highly motivated to pursue employment training or job readiness services that will lead to gainful employment;
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Eligibility and Program Requirements (continued)

- participate in activities consistent with job training or job acquisition for 40 hours each week;
- have an approved post-secondary employment training plan (CHEER plan) developed by the CHEER Coordinator and the Area Office Adolescent Program Manager;
- be in good standing in accordance with the standards of the employment program;
- be in compliance with relevant DCF policies; and
- have a referral packet reviewed and approved by the DCF Central Office CHEER Coordinator.

Exceptions may be granted in cases in which a Special Education youth or an English Language Learner graduates from high school after his or her 21st birthday and in accordance with an Individualized Education Plan or due to other extraordinary circumstances.

A [DCF-2252 "CHEER Contract"](#) shall be written by the Adolescent Specialist and the youth and signed twice a year as part of the ACR process. The CHEER contract shall be reviewed quarterly by the youth, the Adolescent Specialist and the Community Case Manager (if applicable).

The CHEER contract shall include, but not be limited to, the following:

- agreed-upon place of residence;
- roles and responsibilities of the youth, DCF and Community Case Manager;
- plan for full-time employment training and employment;
- financial arrangements (e.g., budget, savings);
- statement regarding a proposed timeline to attain self-sufficiency and review dates to determine progress, including anticipated length of community case management;
- statement regarding the youth's successful completion in a DCF-approved Life Skills Program and other recommended programming;
- statement regarding actions to be taken if the youth does not comply with the terms of the contract or program requirements; and
- statement regarding DCF-approved roommates.

Note: Successful completion of the Life Skills Program alone does not entitle youth to CHEER admission.

If a youth will reside in the home of a DCF-approved relative, friend or former foster parent, the responsible adult(s) in the home shall sign off on the youth's CHEER contract agreeing to such an arrangement. Roles, rules and responsibilities of all involved persons shall be identified and agreed to in the youth's CHEER contract and updated on a quarterly basis.

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Eligibility and Program Requirements (continued)

Note: Any funding going directly to the identified adult in the household for rent is considered taxable and reportable income.

Youth shall account for a minimum of 40 productive hours per week. A "productive hour" is defined as time devoted to classes, study time, part-time work, internship, volunteering (if approved), training, apprenticeship, treatment activities, transportation time used for these activities, and any combination of these activities.

Youth shall remain eligible for services as long as they are in good standing with the standards of the employment program and are in compliance with the requirements of the CHEER contract.

Youth who are married or on active duty with any of the armed forces of the United States shall not be eligible for continuing CHEER services.

CHEER Funding

Funding for CHEER housing shall be based on the current Housing and Urban Development (HUD) fair market rental rates for a one bedroom apartment that includes heat. The amount of a youth's stipend shall be based on the current cost of living pursuant to state and federal guidelines.

If a youth receives Social Security benefits or any other entitlements, these monies shall be subtracted from the funding limits provided in this policy and shall be considered as part of the overall budget for the youth.

Note: A CHEER stipend may be used for a youth in out-of-state and boarding arrangements. If a youth is attending an approved CHEER program out of state and living arrangements are not provided, the HUD fair market rental rates for that state and area shall be used when calculating the rent portion of the stipend. DCF CHEER boarding rates shall be used if the youth is boarding out of state.

To determine a youth's stipend, the Adolescent Specialist and community case manager, if applicable, shall develop a monthly budget with the youth based on expenditures for rent, food, utilities, telephone, transportation and clothing.

If a youth is participating in a paid internship, fellowship or any learning opportunity that involves a subsidy, this funding shall be subtracted from the funding limits noted in this policy and shall be considered part of the overall budget for the youth.

When calculating the stipend, the post-secondary education annual funding limit shall be taken into consideration. After training costs, materials and other fees related to the approved program are calculated and subtracted from the annual PSE limit, the remaining amount may be used for the stipend.

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CHEER Funding (continued)

Once the stipend is determined, a monthly payment shall be sent to the youth for these items. The youth shall save all documentation for these expenditures and produce them on request. The Adolescent Specialist and Community Case Manager shall monitor spending on these items to assess the youth's compliance with his or her budget.

Youth shall be required to save and deposit 50% of income from employment during the first nine months of the CHEER contract in an interest-bearing savings account,.

Youth shall begin to assume the cost of their care at month ten of the CHEER contract by utilizing earnings from employment. The monthly stipend paid to the youth shall be reduced by 25% each quarter beginning at the 4th quarter or at the beginning of month ten. The stipend shall be reduced by 25% each quarter thereafter.

Note: If the employment training program is longer than ten months, the stipend reduction shall be in the quarter following program completion.

A youth in CHEER may reside in another program approved by DCF through which housing and living expenses are included. These youth shall be eligible for funding for their employment training programs up to the amount of CCSU's tuition, books and fees.

A youth in CHEER may be provided with a maximum of:

- \$1,500.00 for the purchase of furniture;
- \$100.00 for the purchase of food staple start up items;
- \$150.00 for the purchase of housewares and household start up items.

If a CHEER youth returns to stay with his or her biological parent(s) during program breaks, the youth shall be eligible for the CHEER stipend only.

The CHEER stipend shall be processed in LINK by the fifth day of each month in order to cover expenses for the following month. The LINK payment request shall show the fifth of the month as the Request Date and the last Friday of the month as the Scheduled Date.

Note: When a youth is accepted to CHEER, the Adolescent Specialist shall establish a provider number for the youth at least 21 days prior to the beginning of the youth's contract.

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Part-Time Attendance

A youth may be approved for CHEER on a part-time basis with the approval of the Commissioner or designee if:

- the youth presents with or develops a physical health, behavioral health or substance abuse need;
- the youth has been identified as a special education student or the youth has had a 504 Accommodation Plan and continues to need special accommodations; or
- the Commissioner has approved a special exception;

AND

- the youth otherwise meets the criteria set forth in this policy.

Youth approved for a part-time employment enrichment plan shall be responsible for a minimum of 20 productive hours per week.

For youth who are in high school, adult education or a General Equivalency Diploma (GED) program, and in an approved living arrangement, the placement shall be entered in LINK under the service type "Non CHAP Adolescent, #791." This service type is ONLY authorized for Child Welfare Accounting (CWA) use. The Adolescent Specialist shall make requests for this service type to the CHEER Coordinator. Upon approval from the Coordinator, CWA staff shall enter the placement into LINK and shall notify the Adolescent Specialist.

Change of Program

A youth who has not reached his or her 21st birthday and is participating in CHEER may elect to change programs one time and to enroll in a post-secondary education or vocational program. The youth must make his or her decision and apply for a PSE program by the end of the 12th month of the CHEER contract in order to be eligible for this additional opportunity.

All requests for PSE programs shall include a complete PSE packet that has been approved by the Adolescent Program Manager and submitted to the DCF Post-Secondary Educational staff for final review and approval. If approved, this program shall be considered the youth's second and final program.

A youth who has participated in a PSE program may elect to participate in CHEER instead as his or her second post-secondary opportunity.

Discharge from CHEER

A youth may be discharged from the CHEER program if he or she has:

- made a voluntary decision to no longer participate in the program;
 - demonstrated an inability to meet the requirements of the program or terms of the CHEER contract and DCF decides to discharge the youth from participation.
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